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AUTHOR Teasdale, G. R.
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ABSTRACT

In all parts of the world indigenous cultures are under threat by the persistent spread of western culture with its emphasis on individualism, competitiveness, consumerism, and technological change. Indigenous cultures have as much, if not more, to offer the West, than the West can offer them. For the cultures to survive, they must own all aspects of the education of their people. Language is a central part of culture. The primary responsibility lies with families and communities to foster spontaneous, everyday use of the vernacular. Educational policymakers must allow indigenous groups to reconceptualize schooling within their own cultural parameters. In Australia, aboriginal groups have been developing alternative patterns of education for years. At the same time, educators must pay attention to the process by which a given culture learns. Solutions must come from within indigenous communities, not from without. In the Catholic schools of Western Australia, that has meant "two way" or "both ways" education, wherein children learn both aboriginal and western ways through an exchange between the two. Non-indigenous people have a role to play in educational process, not by offering solutions but by changing their attitudes and roles. Their challenge is to work beside indigenous peoples in relationships of equality and mutual respect. (SG)

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CONTRIBUTION OF EDUCATION TO CULTURAL DEVELOPMENT

"The Contribution of Education to the Survival
of Small Indigenous Cultures"

by

G.R. Teasdale
Professor
Flinders University
Adelaide, AustraliaPERMISSION TO REPRODUCE THIS
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This brief paper is addressed to educational policy makers and administrators in those countries where small indigenous cultures still exist. In all parts of the world these cultures are under threat, eroded by the persistent spread of western culture with its emphasis on individualism, competitiveness, consumerism and technological change. For some small cultures it is already too late. The damage done to their values and symbols - the nuclei on which they depend both for their internal development and for their relationships with the wider society - has been irreversible. The consequences, as León-Portilla has pointed out, are "... various types of trauma, marginalization, and the dissolution of the culture's very being..."¹ Elsewhere, however, cultural groups are resisting erosion by pressing for the right to self-determination and survival. Education can play a crucial role in this process.

The paper is written by a non-indigenous person for a non-indigenous audience. It does not presume to tell indigenous peoples how to manage their affairs: too many westerners have imposed their "solutions" on small cultures with disastrous results. Rather, it suggests how managers of education systems might support members of small indigenous cultures as they seek to develop their own survival processes.

Altruism or self-interest?

Why should we be concerned about the survival of small cultures? Altruism is the wrong motive. Too often it leads to a perpetuation of unequal relationships. If we are to stand alongside indigenous peoples we need to acknowledge that our need is at least as great as theirs. They have just as much - if not more - to offer to us, as we to them. The survival of small cultures is equally as important to the dominant societies of the west as it is to indigenous peoples themselves. It is ironic that, at a time when many scientists are pointing humankind back to metaphysical and even mystical explanations of our existence,² western societies are facing a crisis of spiritual and moral decay. As I point out elsewhere:

[Western societies] have moved so far along the road of capitalism, with its emphasis on competition, the consumption of goods and services, and the exploitation of the world's non-renewable resources that they ... are losing their deepest roots. Symptoms of this appear in the breakdown of family relationships, the loss of a sense

of community, and the selfishness and greed that are so apparent in people's relationships with each other. Fundamentally the problem is caused by decay of the deep social, spiritual and moral values that have underpinned our societies in the past. Many of the world's small indigenous cultures, with their essentially spiritual value systems, have retained lifeways based on interdependence, family solidarity and harmony with the natural environment. The western world needs these small cultures as never before. It needs them to point the way forward to a more human, caring and harmonious way of life. The world cannot afford to lose them.³

Our challenge, then, is to work with indigenous groups in relationships of equality and mutual respect, recognising that our own long term survival may well depend upon our capacity to learn from their wisdom. The global difficulties created by western cultures are unlikely to be resolved by more information and greater technological capacity but, as Stanford University ecologist Paul Ehrlich argues, by "quasi-religious" solutions. He believes the problems of the west are inherent in the way we perceive our relationships with the rest of nature, and the way we perceive "... our role in the grand scheme of things".⁴ Indigenous peoples, with their essentially holistic and spiritual world views, have much to teach us in this regard. From an environmentalist perspective David Suzuki agrees: "My experiences with aboriginal peoples have convinced me ... of the power and relevance of their knowledge and worldview in a time of imminent global ecocatastrophe".⁵ A similar argument could be supported from a social, political or even an economic perspective. But if we are to learn from indigenous cultures we must ensure their survival before it is too late.

Finding a starting point

How can education contribute to the survival of small indigenous cultures? Earlier this year a UNESCO sponsored seminar for the Australia-Pacific region was held in Rarotonga, in the Cook Islands. The seminar brought together representatives from indigenous groups in Australia, New Zealand and the island nations of the South Pacific to explore the role of education in the development of small cultures. One overwhelmingly strong theme emerged. It was expressed most clearly in the preamble to the seminar recommendations: "If 'Education for cultural development' is to have meaning the question of who controls/owns the education system is crucial ... indigenous cultures must own all aspects of the education of their people".⁶

It is a hard lesson for non-indigenous people to learn. Dominant cultures, at both national and international levels, find it difficult to relinquish control. For too long they have wrongly assumed the superiority of their own systems and processes. Yet if indigenous people are to have genuine freedom to revive, maintain and develop their cultures they must be given full and authentic control over all aspects of their lives, and their children's lives. Effectively this requires recognition of their prior rights, as original occupants, to ownership and control of

their lands and territories, for educational self-determination is bound up with wider questions of political control, land rights and financial autonomy. This was reflected in the recommendations of the Rarotonga seminar which speak of the sharing by all people of "... the nation's rights, responsibilities and resources in a just and mutually beneficial manner", and elsewhere of the need for indigenous cultures to have an "... absolute guarantee that no veto be exercised by any other cultural group".⁶ As a starting point, then, the survival of small cultures depends on their members having full ownership and control, not only of education, but of all other social, political and economic processes that directly effect their lives.

The importance of language

Language and culture are interdependent, having an almost symbiotic relationship. Erosion of one almost invariably weakens the other. This is particularly true for those small indigenous cultures that have no tradition of written language and thus rely exclusively on oral language for the transmission of cultural knowledge. Harris notes that, in these circumstances, language death can occur in as little as three generations after significant contact with a dominant culture, or roughly sixty to ninety years. "This", he suggests, "is alarmingly sudden". He goes on to point out that the "... crucial matter in language survival is whether the children are both learning the language and using it among themselves".⁷

What can educational policy makers and administrators do to support indigenous language maintenance? This is a complex and much debated question. The Australian experience, however, is that "top down" solutions do not work. The motivation and determination must come from indigenous peoples themselves. Even then the school can play only a secondary role. The primary responsibility lies with families and communities to foster spontaneous, everyday use of the vernacular in the home and community. Fishman has pointed out that nowhere in the world have programs of language maintenance, revival or revitalisation been successful if their major emphasis was on the school rather than on other, more primary social processes. He goes on to say that:

... the school will have its role to play in the overall language maintenance design, but it will do so by serving a vibrant and purposeful community - a community with a modicum of economic, political and religious power of its own - rather than being called upon to do the impossible: to save the community from itself.⁸

An exciting example of the power of community action was given by Maori participants at the Rarotonga seminar. They spoke with deep fervour about the *Kohanga Reo* movement that has spread throughout New Zealand during the past decade. Translated literally, *te kohanga reo* means "the language nest". And this is exactly what the Maori people have created - "nests" where the fledgling child is nurtured in Maori language and culture.

Iritana Tawhiwhirangi, referred to by many in New Zealand as the "mother of *Te Kohanga Reo*", described the birth of the movement to seminar participants in the following way:

In the last ten years Maori people have taken responsibility themselves for strengthening their language, culture and traditions. We have not depended on government because we realised in 1982 that in order to move as we culturally desired we would have to bring our own people together and take collective responsibility. So we began with five pilot schemes that immersed the children in Maori language for eight hours a day from the time they were born. Why did we succeed? Because Maori people owned the program and made all decisions about its operation. It was based on the principle of ownership, of Maori people being able to drive their own canoe.⁹

Ten years after its inception *Te Kohanga Reo* has developed from five initial centres to 680 fully autonomous units where parents and grandparents share with children from birth to five years of age in an environment of total immersion in Maori language and culture. So powerful and successful has the movement become that it has acted as a catalyst for major government reform of primary and secondary schooling in New Zealand, particular emphasis being given to the teaching of Maori language. To its credit the New Zealand government has been prepared to affirm the autonomy of Maori people and allow them to make their own decisions about language programs. It also has been prepared to respond (although perhaps too slowly for some) to requests for support of community initiated language programs, thus giving practical expression to its philosophy that:

<i>Toi te kupu</i>	The stronger the language
<i>Toi te mana</i>	The stronger the <i>mana</i> (the power or prestige of the culture)
<i>Toi te whenua</i>	The stronger the nation. ¹⁰

Reconceptualising education

The concept of the school is a western invention that had its origins in the European enlightenment, the rise of modern science and the industrial revolution. It is a concept that has imprinted itself on most other cultures around the globe with remarkable strength and pervasiveness. Yet it does not necessarily provide the most effective means of transmitting contemporary western knowledge, let alone the knowledge and values of small indigenous cultures. It is important, therefore, that educational policy makers allow indigenous groups the freedom to reconceptualise schooling within their own cultural parameters. To suggest that conformity to the western idea of the school is a precondition for effective learning in either the dominant or the indigenous culture is quite inappropriate. Various Aboriginal Australian groups have been developing alternative patterns of education for a number of years, initially with significant opposition from government. There is much we can learn from their experience:

Yipirinya School. In the arid centre of Australia is the town of Alice Springs. Dissatisfied with the lack of cultural support in mainstream schools, Aboriginal parents in the town established their own primary (elementary) school in 1978. Despite the refusal of the Northern Territory government to register and fund the school, and the threat of Supreme Court action to force its closure, parents persisted, growing firmer and ever more determined in their struggle. In 1983 the intervention and financial support of the federal government ensured its long-term survival.¹¹ Since then Yipirinya has grown strong as a fully Aboriginal owned and controlled school. As it has grown it has evolved into what is best described as an all-age community education centre where Aboriginal people participate at every level of the teaching/learning interface. It incorporates child minding and pre-school facilities for children from birth to five years of age. At primary and secondary level four language groups each go to a separate teaching area for language and cultural studies, coming together during part of each day for a curriculum based on western knowledge and skills. There is a teacher education program where Aboriginal people can gain a formal teaching qualification. Post-school and adult education programs operate on demand. A literature production unit ensures a steady supply of attractive and culturally relevant literacy materials in each of the four languages of instruction. What began as a primary school has become a unique centre where all members of the local Aboriginal community can share together as both teachers and learners in an environment that affirms their language and culture.

Homeland centre schooling. Throughout central and northern Australia during the past twenty years Aboriginal people have been moving out in small extended family groups to reoccupy traditional lands. This dispersal from larger communities has become known as the 'outstation' or 'homeland centre' movement. As well as reaffirming spiritual ties to the land the movement has allowed a return to more traditional lifeways.¹² It also has resulted in less formal patterns of schooling. One of the earliest examples comes from Hermannsburg in central Australia. Parents requested that non-Aboriginal teachers based in the main community visit each outstation for two hours per day, their responsibilities being limited to the teaching of English language, literacy and numeracy. Teaching was carried out in the open air, or in some form of temporary shelter. All other forms of education were provided by family members within the informal setting of the camp. In other places family groups have accepted full responsibility for the education of their children, relying on weekly, fortnightly or even less frequent visits from peripatetic teachers to provide curriculum resources and support. Overall there are wide variations in the way kin groups are arranging for the education of their young, but in almost every case there is clear evidence that homeland centre education is playing an important role in the maintenance of language and the renewal of cultural identity.

In both of the above examples Aboriginal Australian groups have reconceptualised the schooling process in quite significant ways, achieving a synthesis between their traditional, informal patterns of education and the more formal, structured approaches of the west. In recent years the Australian government has been increasingly supportive of such initiatives, providing Aboriginal groups with funding for capital developments and resources in ways that affirm their freedom to choose models of schooling that enhance language and cultural development.

Reconceptualisation of schooling is relatively straightforward in settings where all students are from similar cultural backgrounds. But what of interactive settings involving students from two or more different cultures? Here it becomes more complex. One successful example is Tikipunga High School in Whangarei, in the north island of New Zealand. This large secondary school of approximately one thousand students, with almost equal representation of Maori and Pakeha (European), has been totally restructured into a non-hierarchical, democratic institution in which students take full responsibility for their own learning. The teaching year is divided into six blocks of six weeks. In each block students select five curriculum modules. Assessment is achievement based; the aim is not to find out what students do not know, but to identify learning outcomes in a constructive and affirming way. Students are expected to be self-disciplined and to monitor their own learning. The school operates on the philosophy that each cultural group should function efficiently in the other's culture, that conflict resolution is the responsibility of all members of the school community (with students playing an active role, even in conflicts between staff and students), and that non-violence (to self, others and property) is to be practised at all times. As a result the school has developed a distinctive ethos characterised by supportive human relationships within and between all groups - children, teachers, ancillary staff, parents, community leaders and elders; by strong parental and community participation; and by the recognition and nurture of the talents of each individual in the school community (at the end of each year the school holds a praise giving, not a prize giving, at which it affirms the contributions made by staff and students alike).¹³

The example of Tikipunga High School demonstrates that reconceptualisation can be effective in a bicultural, bi-ethnic setting. It requires open and effective dialogue between the two cultural groups and a willingness to compromise in order to achieve outcomes that are culturally acceptable to both. Perhaps the most important lesson from Tikipunga, however, is that Maori culture is not just a "subject" to be "taught", but has permeated the whole structure and ethos of the school. Maori culture has effectively become a "way of life", or a lived experience, for Maori and Pakeha, for staff and students, for parents and children. It is not only having a profound impact on the cultural development of the local Maori community but is adding important integrative and interdependency dimensions to Pakeha education.

The problem of process

Assuming that members of a small culture have established full ownership and control of education, successfully developed their own community-based language program, and reconceptualised education within their own cultural parameters, they are still faced with one of the most daunting questions of all, that of process. In fact, some observers argue that differences between indigenous and western processes of knowledge acquisition diverge so widely that they appear incompatible. Most small indigenous cultures rely on informal processes, with learning taking place in the context of everyday activities. It is largely an unconscious process of observation, imitation and role playing, in contrast to the formal verbal instruction of western societies. Traditionally, children in most indigenous cultures have learnt through real-life performance in concrete situations, through successive approximations to the mature end product, and by persistence and repetition. This contrasts with western learning which takes place in the contrived setting of the school, involves practising artificially-structured activities as a means to a future end, places significant stress on the sequencing of skills and the practising of individual components, and requires emphasis on analysis and efficiency.¹⁴

The question of process has received considerable attention in Australia. The cultures of traditional Aboriginal Australians and those of contemporary western societies are probably as unlike as any in the world. Paramount to Aboriginal world view is the coherence of land, people, nature and time. Meaning lies in wholeness and relatedness. The spiritual dimension acts as an integrating force, pervading all aspects of life. As Christie points out: "...all western notions of quantity - of more and less, of numbers, mathematics and positivist thinking - are not only quite irrelevant to the Aboriginal world, but contrary to it. ... A world view in which land, spirit beings, people and trees are all somehow unified does not lend itself to scientific analysis".¹⁵ In such a system all questions of truth and belief have been answered already in the law and the dreaming. This has profound implications for learning processes:

Aboriginal learners are not expected to analyse or question the basis of belief, even when dissonance exists. Theirs is a 'closed' system with cause and effect relationships having a religious rather than a 'rational' explanation. This contrasts with the openness of western thought that encourages a scientific and analytical approach aimed at resolving dissonance between conflicting sets of beliefs. Where westerners seek logical harmony in their explanations of reality Aboriginal people have a tolerance for ambiguity; what they believe is more important than what they understand. Knowledge therefore is not queried or challenged, especially by young people, and from an early age curiosity in children is deliberately discouraged.¹⁶

In light of the above it appears almost certain that the use of western processes of teaching and learning in schools for Australian Aboriginal children will be destructive of at least some traditional values and beliefs. Aboriginal culture clearly is vulnerable when confronted by a

western world view that emphasises quantification, individualism, positivism and scientific thought. To a greater or lesser extent the same problem applies to other small indigenous cultures that are forced to co-exist alongside dominant western societies. It therefore may be helpful to examine attempts currently being made in Australia to resolve the dilemma posed by incompatibilities between the two learning systems.

Increasingly it is being recognised that the only effective solutions will be those developed from within Australian Aboriginal communities, not those imposed from without. Nevertheless, curriculum advisers and managers of education systems can facilitate the search for solutions. Their first task should be to examine their own prejudices and presumptions, particularly in relation to western knowledge. Built into the hidden curriculum of most schools is the assumption that western knowledge is indispensable to the progress of the human race - that somehow it is superior, more powerful and more valid than any other form of knowledge. Speaking to non-Aboriginal teachers in Aboriginal schools Harris cautions them to...

...guard against western value aspects of the hidden curriculum. [You] would do this mainly by making the hidden curriculum explicit, emphasising that western skills are being learned so that Aborigines can function effectively in the western domain - they are not learning these skills because such ways are better. Thus the western content and skills ... would be a kind of giant role play - to be learned but not believed in as necessarily representing the best way to live. ... When an Aboriginal child learns consciously to put on and take off western roles, almost like a set of clothes, these roles can more easily be kept external to their most personal Aboriginal identity. Teachers ... have the responsibility to tell the children that this is how westerners do things, and that they don't have to agree with it or believe in it.¹⁷

Teachers, advisers and managers also need to recognise that their role in indigenous societies is not to dispense knowledge, but to share it. They should be co-learners. Their minds need to be open to learning as much - if not more - from the other culture as they offer from their own. One way of sharing is to use a negotiated meaning approach in which incompatibilities between the two learning systems are identified and analysed. Crawford, for example, developed a process of negotiated meaning in the field of mathematics with Aboriginal adults enrolled in an on-site teacher education program in Pitjantjatjara communities in central Australia. She entered into a complex process of exchanging mathematical meanings that allowed participants to achieve a deeper understanding of western systems while reaffirming their own cultural knowledge and identity. Crawford reports that this process of comparative analysis and negotiation was a slow and exhausting one, but ultimately deeply enriching both for her and the participants, the latter also reporting that they felt more confident to interpret and explain western mathematical concepts to children in their schools.¹⁸ The concept of negotiated meaning also has been developed at Yirrkala school, Wunungmurra comparing it with the traditional negotiation of meanings that takes place between moieties in some Aboriginal

cultures. He stresses that negotiation must take place under the influence of *Rom* (law) and respect the role of elders.¹⁹

The Aboriginal search for solutions to the problem of process centres around the concept of "two way" or "both ways" education, or "two way learning". The latter concept has evolved in Catholic schools in the Kimberley region of Western Australia, and now underlies all of their curriculum planning and development. It emphasises the need for children to learn "both ways of life" - the Aboriginal and the western - through "sharing and exchange between the two sides".²⁰ This is achieved through Aboriginal decision-making, close integration of school and community, the strengthening of teaching-learning relationships between older and younger members of the community, and the development of flexible school structures. At Warrmarn (Turkey Creek), for example, most members of the grandparent generation spend the first hour of each school day with the children teaching Kija language and culture, and many then stay on at school to participate in various learning activities. Essentially they control the school and play a strong and active role in its two way learning processes.

The concept of the "two way" or "both ways" school has developed mainly in Arnhem Land. Harris cites Yunupingu, the principal of the Yirrkala school, writing in 1987: "[We] began working towards a Both Ways curriculum last year. If you have control of both languages you have double power. The emphasis should be put on Yolngu [Aboriginal] language and culture so they are respected equally [with English]"²¹ Another teacher at Yirrkala, Wunungmurra, has written: "It is through an exchange of meanings that we can produce a 'two way' curriculum which will give our children the flexibility to live in both Yolngu [Aboriginal] and Balanda [European] worlds. to live in both worlds we need to achieve a high standard in [western] education but to keep our identity".²² Wunungmurra then goes on to describe the major features of a two way school:

- Aboriginal ownership of the school program is recognised.
- Community members take the initiative in shaping, developing and implementing the curriculum.
- Clan elders come in to the school to teach, thus re-affirming relationships between younger and older generation levels.
- Children are organised by clan (or kin) groups for instruction, not by age, and boys and girls are taught separately.
- Flexible structures and routines allow for the recognition of traditional ceremonial obligations, especially during initiation.
- Equal respect is given to Aboriginal and western knowledge; the exchange of knowledge is stressed.²³

A particularly clear and compelling account of how a two way school operates in practice was given at the Rarotonga seminar by Elizabeth Milmilany, an Aboriginal teacher-linguist at Milingimbi in north-east Arnhem Land. Rather than distort her account by attempting to condense or quote from it, her paper is included in full (see Appendix A). It provides some excellent examples of the features identified by Wunungmurra.

The use of metaphor as a tool to facilitate understanding is widely used by some Aboriginal groups. At Yirrkala, a coastal community, the people have extended the notion of two way schooling using a metaphor based on the *ganma* process. Within their language (Gumatj), *ganma* describes the situation where fresh water from streams and rivers encounters salt water from the sea and the two flow together and engulf each other: "In coming together the streams of water mix across the interface of the two currents and foam is created at the surface so that the process of *ganma* is marked by lines of foam along the interface of the two currents".²⁴ *Ganma* curriculum theory deals with the processes of drawing together the two streams of knowledge - Aboriginal and western - and recognising that they can be mutually enriched by their interaction. The *ganma* curriculum process operates within legitimate Aboriginal knowledge-producing procedures and under the authority of clan elders, and is directed towards full Aboriginal control over all curriculum decision-making. It therefore has become a powerful tool for defining curriculum content and process in both the hub and homeland centre schools at Yirrkala.

In summary, it is clear that the problem of process is a complex one for indigenous peoples. Aboriginal Australians probably have moved further than any of the other small indigenous cultures in the world in dealing with the problem both in theory and practice. Even so, most Aboriginal educationists admit they still have a long way to go in developing curriculum content and processes that achieve an effective balance between the acquisition of functional western knowledge and the maintenance and development of Aboriginal languages and cultures.

Conclusion

The survival of small indigenous cultures is important not just for the well-being and sense of identity of their own members, but because, embedded in their knowledge, value and belief systems, are social, political, environmental and even spiritual solutions to many of the crises facing contemporary western societies. The survival of small cultures is important for all humankind. Education can play an important role in this survival, especially in settings where small cultures are co-existing alongside dominant western societies. Non-indigenous people do have a role to play, not by offering solutions but by changing their own attitudes and roles. Their challenge is to work alongside indigenous peoples in relationships of equality and mutual respect.

Already solutions are starting to emerge from within some indigenous cultures. Socio-cultural conditions vary widely, and approaches that work in one setting may not be appropriate in another. However the following directions obviously are important:

1. It is imperative that indigenous peoples have genuine freedom to make their own decisions about education. They have every right to full ownership and control, not just of education, but of all other social, political and economic institutions that directly effect their lives.
2. Language is crucial to cultural survival, and full support should be given to indigenous peoples' initiatives to revive, maintain and develop their languages, especially when these initiatives are based in families and communities, and not only in schools.
3. Indigenous groups should be given freedom to reconceptualise schooling within their own cultural parameters. Resources should be made available to ensure they have full opportunity to choose models of schooling that enhance language and cultural development.
4. Western knowledge may be best transmitted as a kind of "giant role play" to be learned but not necessarily agreed with, or believed in.
5. The negotiated meaning approach may be useful in sharing knowledge and dealing with some of the incompatibilities between western and indigenous processes of learning.
6. The concept of "two way" or "both ways" schooling developed by Australian Aboriginal communities offers a potentially powerful way of dealing with the dilemma posed by the fundamental differences that exist between the teaching-learning processes of western and indigenous cultures.

Footnotes

¹ León-Portilla, M, *Endangered cultures* (transl. by J Goodson-Lawes), Southern Methodist University Press, Dallas, 1990, pages vii - viii.

² See for example Davies, P, *The mind of god*, Simon & Schuster, NY, 1992; Hawking, S W, *A brief history of time*, Bantam, London, 1988; Reaney, D, *The death of forever*, Longman Cheshire, Melbourne, 1991.

³ Teasdale, G R & J I, Introduction to *Voices in a seashell: education, culture and identity*, Institute for Pacific Studies, University of the South Pacific, Suva, 1992.

⁴ Cited in Knudtson, P & Suzuki, D, *Wisdom of the elders*, Allen & Unwin, Sydney, 1992, page xxiv.

⁵ Suzuki, D, A personal foreword: the value of native ecologies, in Knudtson and Suzuki, *Wisdom of the elders*, page xxxv.

⁶ Recommendations from the Rarotonga seminar, in Teasdale, *Voices in a seashell*.

⁷ Harris, S, *Two-way Aboriginal schooling: education and cultural survival*, Aboriginal Studies Press, Canberra, 1990, page 72.

⁸ Fishman, J, *The rise and fall of the ethnic revival*, Mouton, Berlin, 1985, page 374.

⁹ Tawhiwhirangi, I, Transcript of a presentation at the UNESCO sub-regional seminar on *Education for cultural development*, Rarotonga, Cook Islands, February 1992.

¹⁰ *Tihe Mauri Ora!* Maori language - junior classes to Form 2, Ministry of Education, Wellington, 1990, page 10.

¹¹ For further discussion of Yipirinya see Teasdale G R & J I, Rekindling the flame - Aboriginal initiatives in education, *UNESCO Review*, 12, August 1986, pages 2 to 4.

¹² For a detailed analysis of the homeland centre movement see Downing, J, *Ngurra walytja, country of my spirit*, Northern Territory Research Unit, Australian National University, Darwin, 1988.

¹³ This description is based on a visit I made to Tikipunga High School in June 1992.

¹⁴ For a more comprehensive analysis see Harris, S, *Culture and learning*, Australian Institute for Aboriginal Studies, Canberra, 1984.

¹⁵ Christie, M J, Aboriginal perspectives on experience and learning, Deakin University Press, Geelong, 1985, page 11.

¹⁶ Teasdale, G R & J I, Culture and curriculum: dilemmas in the schooling of Australian Aboriginal children, in Iwawaki, S, Kashima, Y and Leung, K, eds, *Innovations in cross-cultural psychology*, Swets & Zeitlinger, Amsterdam, 1992, page 445.

¹⁷ Harris, S, *Two way Aboriginal schooling*, pages 16 and 64.

¹⁸ Crawford, K, Bridging the gap: bicultural teacher training in mathematics education for Aboriginal trainees from traditional communities, *South Pacific journal of teacher education*, 14(1), April 1986, pages 44 to 55.

¹⁹ Wunungmurra, W, 'Dhawurpunaramirra': finding the common ground for a new Aboriginal curriculum, *Curriculum perspectives*, 8(2), October 1988, pages 69 to 71.

²⁰ *Two-way learning: language and culture in schools*, revised edition, Kimberley Catholic Education Language Team, Broome, December 1988, pages 5 and 6.

²¹ Harris, S, *two way Aboriginal schooling*, page 12.

²² Wunungmurra, W, 'Dhawurpunaramirra' ... page 69.

²³ Wunungmurra, W, 'Dhawurpunaramirra' ... pages 69 to 71.

²⁴ Yirrkala Community School Action Group, *Interim report on the project: towards a ganma curriculum in Yolngu schools*, Yirrkala, February 1989, pages 7 to 10.

EDUCATION FOR CULTURAL DEVELOPMENT

Case Study: Yolngu Curriculum at Milingimbi, the
Dhanaranala Murrurinydji Gaywananala (DMG)
Program

Elizabeth Milmilany
Teacher-linguist in Training
Milingimbi Community Education Centre
Milingimbi
Northern Territory

Background

Milingimbi is a small island off the Arnhemland coast in Northern Australia, 300 miles from Darwin. It has a population of about 1,000 people.

In the earlier times Aboriginal people used to speak their own tribal languages, up until 1926 when they first started the school in Yolngu matha (language). During that time, the main languages that they learnt to read and write were Gupapunya and Djambarrpuynu. There are about eighteen different languages spoken in Milingimbi but even though they are dialects we understand each other. Not many traditional Aboriginal languages are spoken today. The languages used in Milingimbi are divided into two main moiety groups Dhuwa and Yirritja.

At Milingimbi, the school is run under the Education Department's policies and curriculum. The Department expects all teachers, both Yolngu and Balanda to abide by the policies for all schools whether they are Aboriginal or Balanda Schools.

In 1973 the Australian Government officially granted Bilingual Education. Milingimbi School is a Bilingual school so most of the staff get together to develop their own school based curriculum and policies. The curriculum development policy is put together by Curriculum Committees which are a combination of Balanda and Yolngu staff. The work of these Committees also helps the other teachers in the school see which level children are in and what types of learning skills they have had in the past. The main aims for developing the curriculum document is to look at the school resources and choose what is best to achieve for our school aims. The purpose of the education in this school is to have appropriate aims and to take into consideration what the community thinks is important for the children to learn at the time. Most of the subject areas have a school based curriculum and it covers the Northern Territory core curriculum.

The Milingimbi Bilingual Program began in 1973 as one of the four pilot schools (Bilingual Accreditation Report 1988). The decision was made by the Community that the Gupapuynu language would be used in the school for the Bilingual Program. Milingimbi school gained provisional accreditation during 1985, then in 1988 Milingimbi Bilingual program was fully accredited.

Reasons why DMG started

The purpose of developing school based bilingual curriculum and policies is because Milingimbi is a Yolngu school. Yolngu people want to control decision making and be able to develop relevant programs based on "two ways" education.

We decided to do our own way of structuring our curriculum plan, to help the Yolngu and Balanda teachers to plan together in a way of team planning and not individual planning.

Yolngu teachers know what background they come from and have an extensive range of knowledge about their environment. They already know when to gather foods and when is the right season to hunt for certain foods such as turtle, fish, shellfish, crabs, mangrove worms and bush foods. They understand the Arnhemland environment and seasonal changes.

The Yolngu teachers also know the attitudes of the children and their backgrounds, who children's parents are and what they are like. The kinship system is also fundamental to children in the classroom whom to avoid and whom to talk to (Yolngu term of avoidance relationship). The Yolngu know who are the traditional landowners and their attitudes towards certain areas of significance, as well as the religious and spiritual aspects of ceremonies when they are to be held.

They know when the boys are sometimes required to attend certain ceremonies as demanded by the Elders for their cultural knowledge.

Therefore we decided this knowledge would be a good basis for a Yolngu language program. All this knowledge can be used to create new language texts with the children.

In the DMG program we are continuing to collect other stories, art/craft and different traditional language for different clan groups, and knowledge available to us so that teachers can plan activities together in reading, recording, listening and speaking for the development of our children's language skills.

While we have developed curriculum in the areas of Art, Social Science and Language, many of the lessons for the curriculum are the same. We call our DMG Program Dhanaranala Murrurinydji Gaywananala, which is a name from Dhalinybuy homeland centre. It relates to the central authority which brings people together and governs the conduct of all ceremony and other traditional situations. This name was suggested to us by one of the Wangurri clan leaders, who gave us permission to use it for this language curriculum. We thought it was a good name because this curriculum is based on our traditional life style.

Teachers, Strategies and Aims

The long term content goals of the DMG program are generally determined by the responsible co-ordinator, so that the teachers can carry out the teaching strategies in the classroom situation. Teachers have an important role to play to develop children's knowledge.

The most important people, when it comes to developing curriculum for Aboriginal people are the Aboriginal teachers. They receive help in preparation with lay-out of the materials from their Balanda counter-parts. Important strategies for the program come when thinking of developing curriculum that will work in the classroom environment.

This program will enable students to engage in practical experience outside the classroom in a variety of literacy skills. Some of the program will be separate from the mainstream curriculum, but the overall approach to develop this curriculum is to get the understanding of the students from, Yolngu worldview perspective into Balanda, and the language projects will be to attempt to group some of these projects into small number of curriculum practice that illustrates the curriculum principles outline.

The another positive feature is the emphasis placed on students and teachers to arrange their Literacy skills of multi-cultural learning in vernacular and participation. Students are expected to carry their learning strategy with motivation. Parents are encouraged to become involved from the beginning of these lessons, the students will be encouraged where they will be required to participate with a new and creative approach to curriculum and their sense of responsibility to assert control over their own lives, so they can actively participate in creating a positive and productive future.

The program is run by the Yolngu staff which is co-ordinated by the school Teacher -linguist and Teacher-linguist in Training. The Yolngu staff are responsible for 10 weeks planning and the teaching of the program with the help of community members. The community and Yolngu have decided to have 50% Yolngu curriculum and 50% balanda curriculum. The former takes place daily from 10:00-12:30. The children are grouped according to the needs of the subjects taught (Dhuwa/Yirritja, Malk groups, boys and Girls or sometimes in age for grade classes).

Similarly the lessons take place according to the subjects taught. For example, in language lessons children are kept in the classes where they are taught by community members, and sometimes they are taken out for excursions to see and experiment directly.

The aims of the program are to teach the children to read and write in their own language and to learn cultural aspects of Yolngu knowledge. One of the strategies to teach the children how to read and write is to surround the classroom environment with written material, posters, big books, audio visual materials etc.

The subjects taught are always from a cultural perspective and the children learn by watching, listening and recording. The children learn to write by watching and copying the models. The children learn many aspects of cultural knowledge, their own language and most importantly they have the opportunity to understand balanda culture through their own cultural heritage.

Reaction and participation of the community

The Milingimbi Community feels that it is important for Yolngu youths to be literate in their own language and to be able to maintain, develop and to appreciate the significance of distinctive culture which is a rich and important part of the nation's living heritage.

Today this new initiative is being carried out by Yolngu staff with some balanda teachers, to make sure that children are not learning much modern technology, and to equip them in their traditional education.

The DMG program takes place within the school on aspects of traditional knowledge and it is not only integrated into the school based curriculum but, and most importantly, liaise with both the community council and community members. Parents and knowledgeable people are asked to advise and to collaborate in the Program at all stages. From the beginning to the implementation of the Program. The community council is interested and keen to see this program operating. After several meetings with the members of the Council, they realised the importance of a Yolngu curriculum and support and encourage the program.